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ABSTRACT

Inservice training programs on the needs of English as a second language (ESL) students may help writing lab staffs work more effectively. The training program could be a series of sessions devoted to six areas of concern: bridging the culture gap; profiling students' strengths and weaknesses; identifying error patterns on which to work in the writing lab; presenting the materials that will be used in the tutorials; describing two sequences of activities, one for remediating and another for teaching certain features of grammar or writing; and "putting it all together" in tutorial sessions. The session on cultural differences should focus on ethnocentrism, the use of personal space, sex roles, the roles of tutors and teachers, and the uniqueness of each ESL student. It is important not only that the lab staff respect foreign students' customs, but also that foreign students learn to respect and cope with some of ours. For example, ESL students need to know that teaching methodologies vary from culture to culture. Since students' reactions to touching vary depending on their culture, tutors should learn to avoid it unless they know it is culturally acceptable. Tutors should also be aware of both students' motivations for studying in the United States and how they are adapting to U.S. culture. Adjustment problems may result in a lack of concentration, poor attendance, or tardiness. Through empathy and respect for cultural variation, tutors can achieve a better learning environment. (Attached is an overview of the session on cultural differences.) (HOD)

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BRIDGING THE CULTURE GAP: THE FIRST PHASE OF TRAINING WRITING LAB TUTORS TO WORK WITH ESL STUDENTS

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In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of nonnative speakers of English at junior colleges, colleges, and universities in the U.S. Many of these students enroll first in intensive English programs full or part-time. Soon they are taking regular college courses, but they are often still struggling with their English writing skills. As a result, ESL students are sometimes referred to the campus writing lab. When many ESL students arrive at the lab, the writing lab staff may wonder how the lab can help these students whose language and culture is different from the usual student clientele. In-service training programs about ESL students' needs may help writing lab staffs to work more effectively with second language students.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the first of six topics that could be covered during an in-service training program for lab tutors. This training program could be a series of sessions devoted to six areas of concern: bridging the culture gap (1 hour); profiling students' strengths and weaknesses (1 hour); identifying error patterns to work on in the writing lab (1½ hours); presenting the materials that will be used in the tutorials (½ hour); describing two sequences of activities, one for remediating and another for teaching

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certain features of grammar or writing (1 hour); and "putting it all together" in tutorial sessions (1 hour). Of the topics listed above, the third, fifth and sixth may be best presented to the in-service participants by an ESL instructor. The other topics could be presented by experienced lab tutors who have worked with ESL students.

Working with international students in the writing lab can be personally enriching for writing lab tutors; nevertheless, it is often very frustrating. One source of frustration is the lack of knowledge that tutors have about their ESL tutees' cultures. Similarly, the ESL tutees have a fragmented knowledge of American culture and are experiencing culture stress, even after they have been in the United States for over a semester.

While it is an impossible task to even get a basic understanding of Taiwanese, Malaysian, Vietnamese, Hmong, Mexican, Venezuelan, or Nigerian culture in a short amount of time, it may be possible to cover some of the sources of frustration that are present in many cross-cultural situations. Articles by McLeod (1980), Trifonovitch (1980), Miner (1956), and Hall (1959) may provide useful background knowledge around which in-service discussion can build. Topics for discussion should include ethnocentrism, the use of personal space, sex roles, the roles of tutors and teachers, and the uniqueness of each ESL student.

Growing up in the American culture, we have come to accept various aspects of our lifestyles. We have become so familiar with our behavior patterns that we have come to

think of them as the best or the only ways of behaving. Then, when we meet others with equally strong feelings about their culture, we may feel uncomfortable. If we get into an argument about the superiority of one culture over another, we are arguing ethnocentrically.

In a writing lab, ESL students feel more comfortable if the staff shows respect for cultural variation. Differences, for example, in manner of dress and religious beliefs should be respected.

However, not only is it important that the lab staff respect foreign students' customs, but also it is important that foreign students learn to respect and cope with some of ours. Personal space is one of these cultural patterns.

In a composition class, a student from Kenya wrote about her reaction to Americans' use of space:

> ...The other way that Hall has described space is in the way we react when...(our rules of personal space are violated). Different people from different parts of the world tend to feel comfortable when talking at certain distances. Some people (like Kenyans) like talking from very close, whereas others (like Americans) would prefer a lot of space in between them. I personally don't feel comfortable when I have to shout across three tables at someone. I have found that most Americans would much more prefer to shout than to say something softly.

This Kenyan points out her feeling of discomfort when people, to whom she is talking, stand farther away from her than she would like; in fact, she feels as if she has to shout to engage in a conversation. Similarly, writing lab tutors may feel uncomfortable when a tutee sits too close to them in the lab. An open discussion about feelings about personal space may help tutors to identify their personal space

preferences. Then a tutor, who acknowledges that he doesn't want his personal space invaded, may want to establish firm control over where the tutee sits in relation to himself. For example, a greater personal distance may be achieved by seating a tutee across from the tutor or by their both sitting at the corner of a table rather than next to each other.

A writing lab tutor described an incident that irvolved personal space in a different way. She was tutoring and sitting with a male Malaysian student. The lesson, which was about an intricate grammar point, called for careful explanation. As the tutor became more involved in her grammar explanation, she touch the student's hand to be emphatic. The student jumped in his seat and showed surprise and discomfort. Such a small act may just have disrupted the flow of concentration, or it may have increased the student's culture stress. Since each student's reaction to touching would vary depending on the student's culture, unless a tutor knows that touching in a student-tutor relationship is culturally acceptable, the tutor should avoid it.

The second concern involves the role of women. At present, many foreign students are men. These male foreign students predominantly come from countries such as Venezuela, Taiwan, India, Japan, Iran, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Nigeria and Saudi Arabia where the role of women is still very traditional. Before coming to the U.S., some students from these countries were never taught by women teachers, and some of them have never previously experienced coeducation. Thus, tutees may be

initially uncomfortable with women tutors.

Related to the role of women is the role of tutors and teachers. Tutees come to the writing lab with expectations about teachers and tutors that are based on their culture's roles. These traditional views may present the teachers and tutors as knowing everything. For example, a Japanese language teacher would be expected to know about the history of common words, i.e. how a sandwich came to be called a sandwich, and have a thorough knowledge of rules that apply to grammar. American language teachers and writing lab tutors view their roles differently and are not embarrassed to admit that they don't know everything. However, when tutors admit that they don't have the answers to all questions, tutees' confidence in the tutors may be shattered because of cultural expectations.

Perhaps this problem can be addressed by continually clarifying tutors' roles to the ESL students. ESL students need to know that peer tutors are facilitators, whose knowledge of English grammar rules is not complete, but who will help foreign students improve their writing because the tutors will address the particular needs of each student. Furthermore, ESL students need to know that teaching methodologies vary from culture to culture. For example, Taiwanese students have memorized beautiful passages of Chinese to learn how to express themselves in writing; once in a U.S. writing lab, however, they will not be asked to memorize passages, and the writing lab staff is not in a position to supply them with

such passages.

Although when discussing personal space, sex roles, and tutors' roles, we are focusing on assumed similarities within a group of foreign students, the individual differences between foreign students are also significant. While a number of factors contribute to these differences, students' motivation for studying in the U.S.A. and their adaptation to U.S. culture are especially important.

Even though all foreign students are here for an education, researchers have noted that there are differences between students who are integratively motivated and those who are instrumentally motivated (Lambert 1972). The integratively motivated students are principally interested in learning English so that they will be able to interact with Americans; they look forward to mixing with the Americans around them. The instrumentally motivated students, however, view English as their means to achieve their goal: to get a degree or a job in a certain field. They are not particularly interested in meeting Americans or in learning any more English than they view as necessary for progress in their chosen field. While many ESL students will exhibit both types of characteristics, usually one kind of motivation dominates. Given this pattern, tutors may want to interview students to determine their motivation. Then, if they are working with instrumentally oriented students, they may try to select special materials that use terms that relate to the students' fields of study. For example, Herbert's (1980) and Ewer and Latorre's (1980) textbooks could be used when working with instrumentally motivated pre-engineering students.

In addition to differing in motivation, ESL students also differ in their adjustment to living abroad. Trifonovitch describes this phenomenon and identifies four stages of adjustment. To summarize Trifonovitch's adjustment sequence, newly arrived foreign students are in a honeymoon stage; at this time they are fascinated by the American culture around them, and they are enjoying their new freedom in the new surroundings while only having superficial contact with Americans. The second stage, the hostility stage, sets in when the students become aware of their limitations. They may experience severe language problems and may isolate themselves from Americans; they may feel uncomfortable dealing with American institutions. If they are able to develop a sense of humor about their adjustment problems,they progress to the third stage. At this stage, the humor stage, an acceptance of weaknesses sets in, while more contact with Americans is sought. In the last stage, the home stage, students achieve a certain level of acceptance in the U.S.A. and lead a bilingual and bicultural life. They may use English comfortably in certain places such as at school or work while still using a native language at home.

Trifonovitch suggests that all of these stages are common among foreigners who are trying to deal with their new surroundings. So, when a stage two student who is at the hostility stage comes to the writing lab, he may be trying to cope with a number of personal problems in addition to the writing problem. His adjustment problems may result in a

lack of concentration, poor attendance, or tardiness. While a tutor may empathize with students' problems, students must be reminded of their responsibilities and writing lab rules and procedures.

Besides differing in motivation and in stage of adjustment, ESL students also differ greatly in background. Some are refugees who are settling in the U.S.A., some are U.S. citizens whose first language is not English and some are foreign students. Tutors who have had little personal contact with any of these ESL students may be surprised to learn how different one ESL student may be from another. For example, while at one time many foreign students were from wealthy families, now many of them are not: some of these students had to pass difficult examinations before they were selected for scholarships which then allowed them to study abroad. Other students who are being supported by their families may feel great personal pressure to perform well on tests in the U.S.A.

Besides varying in economic background, students also differ in the social milieu they come from. If a refugee student's family members and other ethnic community members believe that he should become very proficient in English, his attitudes about learning English will be different from those of another student whose family members are principally eager to have him find a job.

In summary, ESL students are often experiencing serious culture stress because of the great differences between American culture and their cultures. ESL students have to

deal with differences in areas such as personal space, sex roles, and tutor/teacher roles. To lessen this culture stress, writing lab tutors can try to monitor and adjust their behavior in cross-cultural interactions with their tutees. They can try to avoid ethnocentrism, monitor the personal space problem, explain their roles as tutors to tutees and treat each ESL student as an individual. Furthermore, they can empathize with the ESL students' many frustrations; then, through their empathy and respect for cultural variation, tutors can achieve a better learning environment which will help bridge the culture gap between themselves and their ESL tutees.

APPENDIX

OVERVIEW OF IN-SERVICE SESSION ONE: BRIDGING THE CULTURE GAP

Objectives

1. To introduce socio-cultural and psychological concepts:
   - ethnocentrism
   - personal space
   - sex roles
   - tutor roles
   - integrated and instrumental motivation
   - four stages of adjustment
   - individual variation

2. To help tutors experience the frustration of their ESL students.

3. To apply these concepts to the tutoring experience.

In-service Leader's Resources and Tasks

1. Resources:
   - McLeod (1980)
   - Trifonovitch (1980)
   - Miner (1956)
   - Hall (1959)
   - Lambert (1972)

2. Learning game: The Trainer's Mirror
   Provide participants with small mirrors (12 x 12 mirror tiles work best) and a sheet of paper with the figure found on the following page. Have participants (work in pairs and) place the mirror in front of them, positioned so they may see the figure in it. Assign them the task of tracing between the parallel lines...around the figure without taking their eyes off the mirror. Measured either in terms of speed or quality..., the participants will have difficulty with the task and sense the frustration often endured by...(ESL students) when everything appears backward to them. (Newstrom and Scannell, 1980: 115)
   Bring materials: Small mirrors and copies of the diagram on the following page.

3. Lecture and introduce concepts; lead discussion on application.

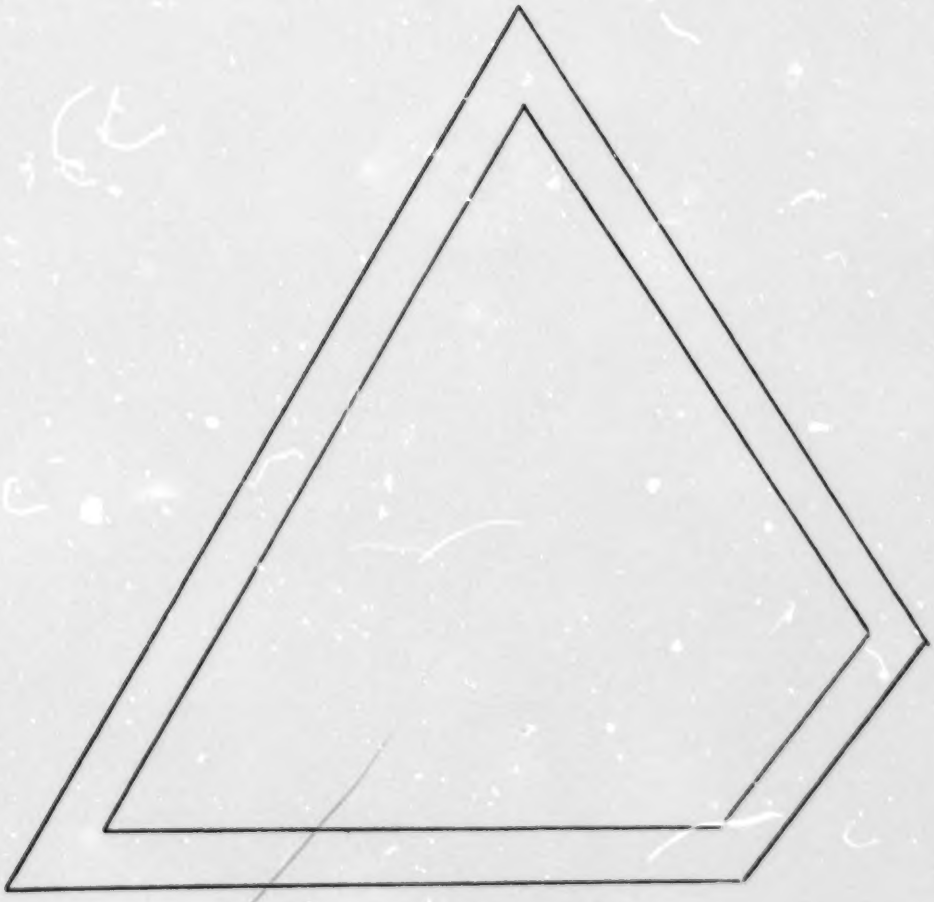
Participants' Tasks

1. Preparation: Read some of the resource articles.

2. Participate in learning game and discuss how it felt. Relate this experience to ESL students' frustrations.

3. Listen to lecture and participate in discussion.

FIGURE 1



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